

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 3122
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN NY
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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (P A R A 2 G A R B L E D)

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: A DIVIDED NRP HOLDS ITS CONVENTION

1. SUMMARY: THE CONVENTION OF THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS
PARTY (NRP) WHICH OPENED MAY 14 IS EXPECTED TO BE THE
SCENE OF RENEWED STRUGGLE AMONG THE PARTY'S SEVERAL
FACTIONS AND WILL MARK THE END OF THE YEAR-OLD
MORATORIUM ON PARTY IN-FIGHTING WHICH HAD BEEN ARRANGED
SHORTLY BEFORE THE 1977 KNESSET ELECTION. THE MAIN
ISSUES BEFORE THE CONVENTION ARE THE YOUTH FACTION'S
BID TO TAKE OVER THE POSITION OF SECRETARY GENERAL, A
CAMPAIGN BY THE PARTY'S DOVES TO MODERATE THE NRP'S
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HAWKISH PLATFORM AND A PROPOSAL TO DISMANTLE THE NRP
LABOR UNION AND TO HAVE ITS MEMBERS INTEGRATED WITH THE
HISTADRUT. THE YOUT FACTION IS EXPECTED TO CON-
TINUE ASSERTING ITS DOMINANCE BY PUTTING ITS
MAN INTO THE PARTY'S KEY ORGANIZATIONAL POST,
WHILE SHARING OTHER IMPORTANT SLOTS WITH THE BURG
FACTION, AND BEATING BACK EFFORTS TO SOFTEN SIGNIFI-

CENTLY THE PARTY'S FORMAL POSITION ON THE TERRITORIES. HOWEVER, DESPITE THE YOUTH FACTION'S BACKING, THE PROSPECTS FOR A PROPOSED MERGER WITH THE HISTADRUT REMAIN UNCERTAIN. END SUMMARY.

2. THE LONG-POSTPONED NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE NRP OPENED LAST NIGHT IN JERUSALEM. THE 900 DELEGATES AND 900 GUESTS HEARD PRIME MINISTER BEGIN DELIVER WARM GREETINGS AND GAVE SUSTAINED APPLAUSE TO THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF INTERIOR MINISTER YOSEF BURG, THE PARTY'S TITULAR HEAD. BURG ATTEMPTED TO MAINTAIN A BALANCE BETWEEN THE HAWKISH AND DOVISH WINGS OF THE PARTY, FIRST CRITICIZING THE "VOCAL MINORITY" IN ISRAEL FOR OFFERING ENCOURAGEMENT TO WASHINGTON AND TO SADAT'S "INTRANSIGENCE" BUT ADDING "THEY HAVE POSED TO US SOME TOUGH QUESTIONS WHICH WE SHALL HAVE TO ANSWER." OVERALL, HOWEVER, AND TO NO ONE'S SURPRISE, IT WAS A STRONG DEFENSE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION ON PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. BURG'S CALL FOR A MERGER WITH THE ULTRA-ORTHODOX AGUDAT YISRAEL (AY) PARTY WAS NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY THE DELEGATES. THE PROPOSAL HAS BECOME A RITUAL AT ALL NRP CONVENTIONS AND IS INEVITABLY REJECTED BY THE AY.

3. THE CONVENTION, SCHEDULED TO RUN THROUGH MAY 17, IS EXPECTED TO BE THE STAGE FOR AN INTENSE STRUGGLE BETWEEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE NRP'S HARD AND SOFT LINERS OVER THE PLATFORM AND FOR THE CONTROL OF THE PARTY. EARLY LAST YEAR AN ALLIANCE WAS FORMED OF THE LARGER GROUPINGS IN THE FACTION-RIDDEN PARTY UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE YOUTH FACTION TO OUST THE CONTROVERSIAL FORMER MINISTER OF RELIGION, YITZHAK RAPHAEL, FROM THE NRP. AT THAT TIME THE ALLIANCE AGREED TO POSTPONE THE NATIONAL CONVENTION FOR A YEAR AND TO MAINTAIN A TRUCE DURING THE 1977 KNESSET ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THE TEMPORARY UNITY THUS FORGED WAS MAINTAINED IN AN ERA OF GOOD WILL THAT FOLLOWED THE SURPRISINGLY GOOD SHOWING THE NRP IN THE ELECTION AND ITS SUCCESS IN OBTAINING THE CABINET PORTFOLIOS IT HAD DEMANDED, INCLUDING THE LONG-COVETED MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. FOR ALMOST A YEAR FACTIONAL DIFFERENCES WERE KEPT IN THE BACKGROUND AS INCREASED PATRONAGE AND INFLUENCE PROMOTED INTRA-PARTY HARMONY. THE FALTERING PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND THE APPROACH OF THE CONVENTION, HOWEVER, REOPENED THE OLD FISSURES. AN AGREEMENT BY THE MAJOR FACTIONS NOT TO COMPETE IN LAST MONTH'S ELECTIONS FOR DELEGATES TO THE CONVENTION BUT TO FORM INSTEAD A JOINT LIST AND APPORTION THE DELEGATES ON THE BASIS OF THE 1973 PARTY ELECTION, DID LITTLE MORE

THAN POSTPONE THE EXPECTED RENEWAL OF THE FACTIONAL STRUGGLES IN THE PARTY.

4. IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS THE CONTEST FOR CONTROL OF THE PARTY HAS COME ONCE MORE INTO THE OPEN, WITH THE YOUTH FACTION FIELDING ITS OWN CANDIDATES FOR POSITIONS IN THE PARTY'S MAJOR ORGANS. MOST OF THESE SLOTS HAVE BEEN FILLED BY PERSONS LOYAL TO BURG. THE CONTEST BECAME PARTICULARLY HEATED OVER SELECTION OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE NRP. ONLY LAST WEEK LEADERS OF THE MAIN FACTIONS REACHED A COMPROMISE GIVING THIS STRATEGIC POST TO 40 YEAR OLD DANNY VERMUS, A PROTEGE OF EDUCATION MINISTER ZVULUN HAMMER, WHILE LEAVING OTHER IMPORTANT POSITIONS, INCLUDING CONTROL OF PARTY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FINANCES, TO THE BURG FACTION. HOWEVER, IT REMAINS AS YET UNCERTAIN WHETHER THE RANK AND FILE MEMBERSHIP WILL ACCEPT THIS SURRENDER OF A KEY BASTION OF POWER OF THE OLD GUARD (BURG'S FACTION) TO THE STEADY ENCROACHMENT OF THE YOUTH FACTION.

5. THE COMPETITION FOR CONTROL OF THE PARTY TAKES ON SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE PARTY'S DOVE-HAWK CLEAVAGE. DIFFERENCES OVER THE

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

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FUTURE OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES ARE PERHAPS WIDER IN THE NRP THAN IN ANY OTHER POLITICAL PARTY (LEAVING ASIDE THE BLOCS OF PARTIES REPRESENTED BY THE ALIGNMENT AND THE LIKUD) AND PRE-DATE SADAT'S VISIT. THE PLATFORM APPROVED AT THE LAST CONVENTION OPPOSES THE ALIENATION OF ANY PART OF ERETZ YISRAEL AND ITS ADOPTION WAS A SIGNIFICANT SUCCESS FOR THE YOUTH FACTION AND MARKED ITS RAPID ASCENDANCY IN THE PARTY. MK DAVID GLASS, OF THE UNITY AND CHANGE FACTION AND A LEADING DOVE, HAS PROMISED A DETERMINED ASSAULT ON THIS HARD LINE. HE CAN COUNT ON THE SUPPORT OF MANY IN BURG'S FACTION AND THE SMALLER FACTIONS, AND HIS CRUSADE EVEN HAS A MEASURE OF SYMPATHY FROM SOME IN THE YOUTH FACTION. THE THINKING OF HAMMER, HIMSELF, SEEMS TO HAVE MOVED TOWARD GREATER MODERATION, THANKS TO SADAT'S INITIATIVE.
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THIS APPARENT MOVEMENT CONTRACTS WITH THE CONSISTENT HAWKISH IDEOLOGICAL PURITY OF HIS CO-LEADER OF THE YOUTH FACTION, MK YEHUDA BEN MEIR. HOWEVER, THE YOUTH FACTION, STIFFENED BY ITS GUSH EMUNIM ADHERENTS, IS EXPECTED TO RESIST ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE PLATFORM'S FORMULATION. THE GLASS-LED DOVES, THEREFORE, FACE AN UPHILL STRUGGLE IN THEIR EFFORT TO GAIN ACCEPTANCE OF THEIR DEMANDS FOR A READINESS TO WITHDRAW ON ALL FRONTS. GLASS HAS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE WOULD BE PLEASED WITH EVEN A LITTLE SOFTENING IN THE PREVIOUS PLATFORM'S LANGUAGE.

6. THE OTHER MAJOR ISSUE BEFORE THE CONVENTION IS A PROPOSAL THAT THE NRP JOIN THE HISTADRUT. THE PARTY HAS ITS OWN UNION, WHICH, DESPITE ITS NOMINAL AUTONOMY, IS DE FACTO RELYING ON ALL HISTADRUT SERVICES AND PROTECTION. ITS MEMBERS PAY DUES TO, AND ENJOY COVERAGE OF, THE HISTADRUT'S HEALTH INSURANCE FUND, KUPAT CHOLIM. THE YOUTH FACTION SUPPORTS ENTERING THE HISTADRUT (WHICH ALREADY HAS A SMALL RELIGIOUS WORKERS COMPONENT), ARGUING THAT DISMANTLING THE NRP'S SEPARATE UNION WOULD PROVIDE A GREAT SAVING IN THE ELIMINATION OF A SEPARATE DUES COLLECTING APPARATUS WITHOUT THE LOSS OF BENEFITS. THE ENTRANCE OF THE

NRP INTO THE HISTADRUT WOULD ONLY SLIGHTLY AFFECT
ITS CURRENT INTERNAL POLITICAL BALANCE, PERHAPS marginally
AUGMENTING THE STRENGTH OF ITS RIGHT WING (LIKUD). HOWEVER, THERE
ARE VESTED INTERESTS IN THE NRP'S SEPARATE UNION AND
ADOPTION OF THE PROPOSAL REMAINS UNCERTAIN.

7. IN SUM: ASIDE FROM THE POSSIBILITY OF JOINING THE
HISTADRUT, NO MAJOR CHANGES ARE EXPECTED FROM THE
CONVENTION. BURG WILL MOST LIKELY BE RETURNED AS A
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FIGUREHEAD CHIEF OF THE PARTY, WHILE THE YOUTH FACTION
CONTINUES ITS GRADUAL TAKE-OVER.
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